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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: WESTERN HEMISPHERE: CUBA, CASTRO'S HEALTH;
SAO PAULO

"Democracy in Cuba"

The lead editorial in liberal, largest national circulation daily Folha de S. Paulo (8/3) remarked: "Considering the little information available [regarding Castro's health], it is premature to believe that Castro's era and the Cuban regime are over. But the unprecedented fact that power has been transferred to his brother Raul Castro indicates that the island is preparing a transition. What is desirable is that a status of full democratic freedom is soon achieved. Brazilian diplomacy should work within non-intervention limits towards that goal.... Raul Castro is an unknown, does not have his brother's charisma and is a hardliner responsible for executing dozens of dictator Fulgencio Batista's supporters.... Everything indicates that he will follow his brother's policy, thereby maintaining the closed regime. It is possible that Washington wants to take advantage of a succession in Cuba to overthrow the regime. This may not be the best strategy to bring democracy to the island. A negotiated democratic transition seems to be a better and less traumatic solution. Suggesting the end of the US-imposed commercial blockade tends to be a more effective method of obtaining concessions from the communist officials than demonstrations of force or veiled threats. The main obstacle to this strategy is the strong ideological colors with which Washington depicts Cuba.... Along with other nations, especially the EU, Canada and Mexico, Brazil's diplomats should concentrate efforts both to convince the Cuban authorities to agree with a political opening and to prevent the White House from carrying out revenge against Castro's successors.... Unfortunately, the record of Brazilian diplomacy in regards to Cuba is bad. Since President Lula da Silva was inaugurated, our diplomacy has limited itself to flattering Fidel Castro, without censoring him for human rights violations." McMullen